

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SS-15 NSC-05 PM-04 CIAE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 EB-08 AID-05

COME-00 IO-13 ACDA-07 /095 W

-----161603Z 064988 /53

R 160700Z FEB 77

FM AMCONSUL ASMARA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4373

AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

CINCUSNAVEUR LONDON

COMNAVTELCOM WASHDC

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN

COMIDEASTFOR

NAVCOMMUNIT ASMARA

NAVCOMMSTA NEA MAKRI

CNO WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 0134

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: EIND, PINS, ET

SUBJECT: POWER CUT OFF TO MOST INDUSTRIAL PLANTS IN ASMARA

1. ON FEB 10, THE ELECTRIC POWER WAS SUSPENDED TO MOST OF THE INDUSTRIAL PLANTS IN ASMARA. THE EXPLANATION BEING CIRCULATED BY THE EPMG MILITARY AUTHORITIES IS THAT THERE IS A SHORTAGE OF POWER FROM EELPA'S BELEZA POWER PLANT. FURTHER INVESTIGATION HAS REVEALED THAT, WHILE THIS REASON MIGHT APPEAR CREDIBLE IN VIEW OF THE MANY POWER PROBLEMS IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS, IT IS NOT, IN FACT, TRUE.

2. ON FEB 9, MILITARY OFFICIALS VISITED THE PLANTS CONCERNED
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AND INFORMED THE MANAGING DIRECTORS THAT BECAUSE OF A POWER SHORTAGE, ELECTRICITY SERVICE WOULD BE SUSPENDED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. THE FACTORIES CONCERNED ARE BARATTOLO TEXTILES, ETHIOFABRIC, SAPE (DETERGENTS AND SOAP, IMA (KNITWEAR), THE THREE SHOE FACTORIES, AND FIVE LEATHER TANNING FIRMS. THE ONLY TWO SIZABLE PLANTS KNOWN TO BE OPERATING ARE MELOTTI BREWERY AND SAVA (GLASS). THE FIRMS THEN RELEASED THEIR WORKERS FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE MONTH OF

FEBRUARY, BUT PROMISED TO CONTINUE TO PAY THEM.

3. A SENIOR OFFICIAL OF EELPA DENIES, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS POWER SHORTAGE, AND CLAIMS THAT ALL EELPA OPERATIONS ARE FUNCTIONING NORMALLY. HE SAID THAT THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES INSTRUCTED HIM TO "DISCONNECT" THESE FACTORIES IMMEDIATELY. DISCONNECTING A FACTORY CAN BE A SIMPLE MATTER OF THROWING A SWITCH, BUT SUCH ACTION WAS NOT TAKEN IN THE PAST WHEN INDUSTRIAL POWER WAS SUSPENDED. THE IMPLICATION OF THE INSTRUCTION TO "DISCONNECT" THE PLANTS IS THAT THE EPMG AUTHORITIES DO NOT INTEND TO RESUME PRODUCTION FOR SOME TIME.

4. THE REAL EXPLANATION FOR THE POWER CUTBACKS TO THESE PLANTS APPEARS TO BE TO CONCEAL THE FACT THAT THE INSURGENTS HAVE EFFECTIVELY HALTED THE INFLOW OF RAW MATERIALS TO ASMARA, RENDERING FURTHER PRODUCTION IMPOSSIBLE. LIKEWISE, THE OUTFLOW OF FINISHED PRODUCTS IS MINIMAL AND THE WAREHOUSES IN ASMARA ARE FULL TO THE RAFTERS.

5. COMMENT: USING THE POWER SITUATION AS A DODGE, THE EPMG OFFERS A MARGINALLY PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR ITS FAILURE TO MAINTAIN INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION, AND THUS SPARING ITSELF THE EMBARRASSMENT OF SUCH AN ADMISSION. THE EPMG AUTHORITIES NOW FIND THEMSELVES IN A VERY DIFFICULT SITUATION, IF THE SHUTDOWN OF THE FACTORIES CONTINUES BEYOND THIS MONTH, THEY WILL HAVE THE CHOICE OF EITHER PAYING THOUSANDS OF IDLE WORKERS INDEFINITELY, OR DISCHARGING THEM AND THEREBY FURNISHING A LARGE POOL OF AVAILABLE RECRUITS TO THE INSURGENTS.

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